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True patriotism hates injustice in its own land more than anywhere else.
– Clarence Darrow

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Israel Violates US Law With Attack on Lebanon

by Thalif Deen

Israel is in violation of U.S. arms-control laws for deploying U.S.-made fighter planes, combat helicopters, and missiles to kill civilians and destroy Lebanon's infrastructure in the ongoing six-day devastation of that militarily weak country.

The death toll, according to published reports, is over 200 people – mostly civilians – while the economic losses have been estimated at about \$100 million per day.

"Section 4 of the [U.S.] Arms Export Control Act requires that military items transferred to foreign governments by the United States be used solely for internal security and legitimate self-defense," says Stephen Zunes, professor of politics at the University of San Francisco.

"Since Israeli attacks against Lebanon's civilian infrastructure and population centers clearly go beyond legitimate self-defense, the United States is legally obliged to suspend arms transfers to Israel," Zunes told IPS.

Frida Berrigan, a senior research associate with the Arms Trade Resource Center at the World Policy Institute in New York, is equally outraged at the misuse by Israel of U.S.-supplied weapons.

"As Israel jets bombard locations in Gaza, Haifa, and Beirut, killing civilians (including as many as seven Canadians vacationing in Aitaroun), it is worth remembering that U.S. law is clear about how U.S.-origin weapons and military systems ought to be used," Berrigan told IPS.

She pointed out that the U.S. Arms Export Control Act clear states that U.S. origin weapons should not

be used for "non-defensive purposes."

"In light of this clear statement, the United States has an opportunity to stave off further bloodshed and suffering by demanding that its weaponry and military aid not be used in attacks against Lebanon and elsewhere, and challenging Israeli assertions that it is using military force defensively," she added.

That would demonstrate the kind of "utmost restraint" that world leaders called for at the G8 Summit of the world's most industrialized nations, which just ended in St. Petersburg, Russia.

The 25-member European Union has said that Israel's military retaliation against Lebanon is "grossly disproportionate" to the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers last week by the Islamic militant group Hezbollah, which is a coalition partner of the U.S.-supported government in Beirut.

Israel has accused both Syria and Iran of providing rockets and missiles to Hezbollah, which has used these weapons to hit mostly civilian targets inside Israel.

Israel's prodigious military power – currently unleashed on a virtually defenseless Lebanon – is sourced primarily to the United States.

Armed mostly with state-of-the-art U.S.-supplied fighter planes and combat helicopters, the Israeli military is capable of matching a combination of all or most of the armies in most Middle Eastern countries, including Iran, Syria, Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.

The air force has continued to devastate Beirut and its suburbs with no resistance in the skies during six days of incessant bombings, causing civilian deaths and infrastructure destruction.

"The Israeli Air Force now flies only U.S.-origin fighters, a mix of F-15s and F-16s, and the rest of the service's fleet is almost completely of U.S. origin," says Tom Baranauskas, a senior Middle East analyst at Forecast International, a leading provider of defense market intelligence services in the United States.

While in earlier years Israel bought from a variety of arms suppliers, with the French in particular being strong sellers to Israel of such items as Mirage fighters, over the past couple of decades the United States has developed into Israel's preponderant arms supplier, he added.

"The U.S. domination as Israel's arms supplier can be seen in the Congressional Research Service's [CRS] annual study of arms sales," Baranauskas told IPS.

He said the latest CRS survey shows a total of \$8.4 billion of arms deliveries to Israel in the 1997-2004 period, with fully \$7.1 billion or 84.5 percent coming from a single source: the United States.

A major factor in this trend was the rise in U.S. foreign military financing (FMF) – outright U.S. grants to Israel – which now totals about \$2.3 billion a year paid for by U.S. taxpayers.

By U.S. law, Baranauskas said, 74 percent of FMF assistance to Israel must be spent on U.S. military products. This U.S. assistance has now become the main source of financing for Israel's major arms procurements, especially its fighter planes.

From a historical perspective, he said, U.S. assistance to Israel during 1950-2005 has been staggeringly high: FMF amounting to \$59.5 billion; \$27 billion in foreign military sales (FMS) mostly government-to-government arms transactions; and \$8 billion in commercial arms sales by the private sector.

Berrigan of the Arms Trade Resource Center said the United States is undoubtedly the primary supplier of Israeli firepower.

In the interest of strengthening Israel's security and maintaining the country's "qualitative military edge" over neighboring militaries, the U.S. Congress provides Israel with annual FMF grants that represent about 23 percent of its overall defense budget. Israel's 2006 military budget is estimated at \$7.4 billion.

According to the Congressional Research Service, FMF levels are expected to increase incrementally by \$60 million a year to a level of \$2.4 billion by 2008 compared with \$2.2 billion in 2005.

"Israel has been the largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid every year since 1976," Berrigan said.

Additionally, the United States provides Israel with billions of dollars worth of weaponry.

She pointed out that recent military sales to Israel include propulsion systems for fast patrol boats worth more than \$15 million from MTU Detroit

Diesel; an \$8 million contract to Lockheed Martin

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Thalif Deen has been Inter Press Service's U.N. Bureau Chief since 1992. A former Information Officer at the U.N. Secretariat and a one-time member of the Sri Lanka delegation to the General Assembly sessions, he is currently editor of the Journal of the Group of 77, published in collaboration with IPS. A Fulbright-Hayes scholar, he holds a Master's degree in Journalism from Columbia University in New York.

for high-tech infrared "navigation and targeting" capabilities for Israeli jets; and a \$145 million deal with Oshkosh Truck Corp. to build more than 900 armor kits for Israeli medium tactical vehicles.

In December of last year, Lockheed Martin was awarded a \$29.8 million contract to provide spares part for Israel's F-16 fighter planes.

Berrigan also said that Israel has one of the world's largest fleets of F-16 fighter planes, made in Fort Worth, Texas, and also in Israel by Lockheed Martin Corporation.

Israel has a total of over 378 F-16s, considered one of the world's most advanced fighter planes – besides 117 F-15s, 94 Skyhawks, 110 Phantoms – all supplied by the United States.

(Inter Press Service)

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